

Preserving the Icons of American Architecture

The federal historic Preservation Tax Incentives program has been a part of the revitalization of a number of icons of American architecture.

These are the examples of American architecture that are emblematic of the nation's greatest design achievements. These masterpieces are found throughout the 50 states and territories of the United States and are in particular need of national support to maintain their prominence and integrity. Using the Rehabilitation Tax Credits, owners of several icons have preserved our nation's jewels. Chicago's Rookery, Union Station in Washington, DC, and the New Amsterdam Theater in Manhattan, are all the beneficiaries of the program.

The Rookery, completed in 1888, has the double distinction of being designed by Burnham & Root, and remodeled by Frank Lloyd Wright, in 1905. Also significant for its early use of partial skeleton framing, and its impressive interiors, it is a landmark of Chicago's Loop area. The magnificent, two-and-a-half-story, interior light court is spanned by an ornate cast iron skylight. Through its first 100 years, the Rookery underwent a number of redecorating and remodeling schemes. The building was designated a National Historic

Designed in 1888 by Burnham & Root and remodeled by Frank Lloyd Wright, the Rookery Building in Chicago's Loop is one of the nation's most famous office buildings. It is significant for its early use of partial skeleton framing and impressive interiors. The Rookery was rehabilitated using the historic preservation tax incentives. Photos courtesy Chicago Landmarks Commission.



Landmark in 1970 and designated as one of Chicago's first city landmarks in 1972. Plans for the most recent restoration began as the building neared its century mark.

The Continental Illinois National Bank & Trust Co. of Chicago applied for the certification of their centennial restoration plans and was approved in 1987. The initial estimate of the cost of rehabilitation was \$20 million. Their architects, Booth/Hansen & Associates, began the project of restoring the exterior and the historic parts of the interior, and creating new office space in the remaining space. Cleaning of the exterior and rebuilding of the parapet walls was completed before the bank management was restructured and the restoration was halted.

The building was acquired by L. Thomas Baldwin, who created a new development partnership to carry through the rehabilitation. McClier Architects and Engineers were installed as the architectural firm, with Thomas Harboe as the project architect. This collaboration resulted in a much-heralded final renovation.

The major period of significance was determined to be 1888 to the 1920s, and ca. 1910 was selected as the time period for the restoration to center upon. Elements from the major architectural design periods were retained and new elements incorporated, respecting the historic fabric and appearance. The light court was reconstructed and the original mosaic floor reproduced from a fragment. New office spaces were installed on the upper floors. Extensive documentation was available to support much of the rehabilitation plans.

The building was reopened to the public in May 1992. The final cost was over \$100 million. Robert Bruegmann, in his article "Preservation's Touchstone" (July/August 1992 *Inland Architect*),



The highly decorative, Art Nouveau style New Amsterdam Theater in New York City is one of the gems of Times Square. It is being rehabilitated using the historic preservation tax incentives. Photo courtesy Museum of the City of New York.

exclaimed, "Complete at last, Chicago's restored Rookery Building sets the standard against which all future commercial renovations must be judged."

Union Station, in Washington DC, is just steps from the United States Capitol, the Supreme Court, and the Library of Congress. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1969. As recently as 10 years ago, however, it was dilapidated and shuttered, as rail passengers were funneled through an adjacent structure.

Designed by Daniel Burnham and completed in 1908, this Beaux Arts station is one of the capital's, as well as the nation's, great portals. The

gilded coffered ceiling in the main hall, the statuary by sculptor Louis St. Gaudens (son of noted sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens), the marble floors, and bronze fixtures are a celebration in the transit of passengers to and from Washington. An unsuccessful renovation of the building in 1976 into the National Visitors Center, in combination with a great decline in rail travel, precipitated the closing of the building.

In 1981, Congress decided the nation's capital could not afford to project the image that Union Station had acquired. The Union Station Redevelopment Corp. was created, and with Union Station Venture Ltd., hired Benjamin Thompson & Associates, Inc. as their project architectural firm. In 1987, the application for certification of rehabilitation of Union Station was approved. An estimated \$54 million was spent on rehabilitating the main building and concourse, adding retail shops, and renovating the office space.

Cleaning, refinishing, updating of mechanical systems, and new uses of the majestic spaces

reclaimed the great space. The separate structure was rebuilt at the rear for the rail service and a garage added for convenient rental car service and patron parking. The entire project was reported to cost \$120 million. Today, thousands pass through using subway, Amtrak, and commuter rail, and thousands more shop, dine, and marvel at the wondrous architecture.

A project in the midst of certification, an estimated \$30-35 million rehabilitation, is underway at the New Amsterdam Theater, in New York City. The New Amsterdam Development Corporation, created by the Walt Disney Company for the rehabilitation and operation of the theater, is working with Building Conservation Associates, Inc., and Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer, Architects.

Designed by Herts and Tallant, architects who specialized in theater design, the New Amsterdam opened in 1903. The highly decorative, Art Nouveau style theater was one of their Times Square gems. Skeletal steel framing, usually reserved for skyscrapers, was used for the internal structure. The innovative use of cantilevered balconies allowed clear views for all seats in the house. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. The main auditorium, 10-story office tower, and roof top theater have undergone previous renovation efforts, but the building has been vacant since the early 1980s.

The current rehabilitation plan calls for extensive restoration of the ornate main theater and its associated public areas to permit live performances and theater operations. There is good documentation, and interest on the part of the developers, to facilitate a historically sensitive restoration. New lobbies and restrooms throughout the auditorium level and basement are proposed. The upper floors and roof top theater space will be stabilized for possible future development. It is slated to reopen in 1997.

Use of the Rehabilitation Tax Credits has given these and other American architectural "masterworks" a new lease on life. While the inspirational and monumental nature of many of these buildings continues, so continues the appreciation for, and tradition of, great design and craftsmanship in this country.

Rosemary Infante is a former National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers program assistant, Heritage Preservation Services, NPS.